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Israel-Hamas conflict animates the reincarnated Canadian Jewish Defense League

20 June 2024

Impacts of the
Israel-Hamas Conflict on Online Harms in Canada
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Hamas' 7 October terror attack on Israel and the subsequent attacks by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in Gaza have galvanised individuals linked to the Jewish Defense League (JDL), which promotes far-right, extremist pro-Israeli views and Islamophobia. This article summarises the narratives and tactics used by this group and potential concerns about their activities.

This briefing is part of ISD's research series looking at the impacts of the Israel-Hamas conflict on extremism, hate and disinformation in Canada. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada. All views are ISD's own.

The Jewish Defence League (JDL) is a far-right group whose stated goal is to protect Jews from antisemitism by whatever means necessary (https://www.adl.org/resources/profile/jewish-defense-league). The American wing of the league was previously labelled a terrorist organisation (https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/jewish-defense-league) by the FBI in their 'Terrorism 2000/2001' report (https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terror) due in part to its connection to planned bombings on 11 December 2001.

The Canadian JDL has not been connected with any terrorist acts and in recent decades it has been largely defunct. However, in 2021, its founders created a new organisation called Israel Now, describing it publicly (https://www.spreaker.com/episode/the-jack-berkovits-show-mar-8-2024-international-women-s-day-the-

normalization-of-antisemitism-meir-weinstein--58974729)as a re-branded Canadian JDL which could fight "the battle" on social media. This briefing looks at activities of Israel Now and related outfits since Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October.

Key Findings

- Following October 7, Israel Now and connected outlets like Never Again Live have supported Israel and the IDF online while monitoring, doxxing and harassing pro-Palestinian protesters, activists and Jewish people seen as insufficiently pro-Israeli.
- Israel Now has also accused politicians and other public figures of supporting Hamas, and both implicitly and explicitly advocated for the use of violence.
- Although small, Israel Now is concerning for multiple reasons, including its direct link to the JDL, which carries a decades-long history of extreme violence (https://www.adl.org/resources/profile/jewish-defense-league) including connection to multiple murders.
- Israel Now actively promotes physical confrontations with Palestinian supporters and encourages direct harassment of individuals online and potentially offline, as well as more broadly promoting anti-Muslim hatred.

Background to the Jewish Defense League and Israel Now

The JDL was founded in New York City in 1968 by Rabbi Meir Kahane (https://www.timesofisrael.com/rabbi-meir-kahane-and-israels-far-right-explained/), an extremist Jewish nationalist described as an anti-Black and anti-Arab racist (https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/meir-kahane-shaul-magid-excerpt), who preached violence as the solution to antisemitism; its slogan, "Every Jew a .22"" was an explicit call to arms. In just a few years, members of the US JDL had been implicated in or convicted of multiple acts of violence, including several bombings and an attempt to hijack an airplane. In July 1971, Kahane himself was convicted (https://www.nytimes.com/1971/07/24/archives/kahane-gets-5year-suspended-sentence-in-bomb-plot.html) of plotting to manufacture explosives. By September that year he had moved to Israel and founded the far-right political party Kach. One of Kach's successor parties, Kahane Chai, was recently delisted as a foreign terrorist organisation (https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/20/us-removes-ultranationalist-israeli-group-from-terror-list) by the US for inactivity.

The JDL has been active in Canada since at least 1978, when the leader of the Toronto chapter Joseph Schachter pled guilty (https://www.jta.org/archive/jdl-youth-pleads-guilty-to-bombing) to detonating a "symbolic" small bomb on a neo-Nazi leader's doorstep. Meir Weinstein has been publicly acknowledged (https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-long-overdue-death-of-the-jewish-defence-league) as the leader of JDL in Canada since 1979. In his livestreams (https://www.youtube.com/@neveragainlive/streams), Weinstein speaks frequently about his friendship with and admiration for Kahane, who was assassinated in 1990.

Although not convicted of actions approaching the same level or intensity of violence as the American wing, the Canadian JDL and its members have been involved in various controversies, alleged assaults and other incidents, particularly at protests. Meir Weinstein was banned (https://www.senecajournalism.ca/head-of-jewish-defence-league-is-banned-from-york-university/) from York University in Toronto in 2019 following a clash between pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups. JDL has also drawn criticism for their links with far-right

and Islamophobic groups like the English Defense League (https://www.haaretz.com/2011-01-12/ty-article/jewish-british-anti-muslim-event-in-toronto-draws-protests-arrests/0000017f-ed83-da6f-a77f-fd8f589e0000) (EDL) and the National Citizens' Alliance (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6hvEFQX508).

In 2021, Weinstein announced (https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-long-overdue-death-of-the-jewish-defence-league) he was stepping down from his involvement with the JDL to focus on a new group, Israel Now. In a radio interview (https://www.spreaker.com/episode/the-jack-berkovits-show-mar-8-2024-international-women-s-day-the-normalization-of-antisemitism-meir-weinstein--58974729) in March 2024, Weinstein described how Israel Now came to exist, saying:

"When the corona[virus] broke out, there were no [JDL] meetings, there was nothing going on... there was still antisemitism, there was still a lot of work to do. So then we just thought, the battle was taking place on social media, so we formed a group to address that called Israel Now... The mission statement is similar to the JDL – we're spending a lot of time monitoring all the different social media platforms by these pro-Hamas organisations, and [we have] been exposing a lot, [and getting] involved in some infiltration at the same time. That kind of work is going on, and [we are] also offering self-defence training, firearm safety instructions as well, so not really diverting too much from what the mission of JDL was, [it] just seems to be more like a rebrand that's going on."

In livestreams and other audio recordings, Weinstein often speaks about JDL and Israel Now interchangeably. Notably, his YouTube videos often include a logo for Israel Now with Kahane's slogan for the JDL, "Every Jew a .22."

On 17 April 2024 the Never Again Live (Weinstein's livestream and podcast) X account posted (https://twitter.com/neveragainlive1/status/1780307299782811954): "Is it time for a new revitalized Jewish Defence League?" It was yet another indication of the ideological contiguity between JDL Canada and Israel Now.

Taking "the battle" to social media

Israel Now has a small social media operation, and an online presence limited to a website and an email mailing list. It lacks dedicated active social media accounts although it does link to accounts for Never Again Live. Most relevant activity on social media appears to take place through a combination of Never Again Live and personal accounts of Weinstein and other Israel Now members such as Gary Branfman. This further muddies the waters between Israel Now and Never Again Live, but it seems evident that the same core group are behind the different brands, including co-branded outputs (see figure 1 below).

Never Again Live is a weekly podcast and YouTube livestream which aims (https://archive.is/Q2zZf) to "expose and confront physical and philosophical global threats to the Jewish Community." They previously livestreamed on Facebook, but the account has since been removed or deleted; a private Israel Now Facebook group still has 630 members.

The YouTube account features a mix of livestream recordings; footage filmed by Weinstein and other Israel Now members at protests; and videos presenting Israel Now's narratives about Israel, Gaza, Palestinians and their supporters. This includes, for example, a video denying the existence of the Palestinian people and calling them "by far the most creative invention of Islam"; videos identifying specific pro-Palestinian activists as "demonic" and alleging that they are Hamas supporters; and videos attacking Jewish Canadians who are perceived as being insufficiently supportive of Israel as traitors and 'Kapos' (a term for a Nazi concentration camp prisoner who was given privileges in return for supervising other prisoners. In this context it appears to

be being used by JDL as a slur).

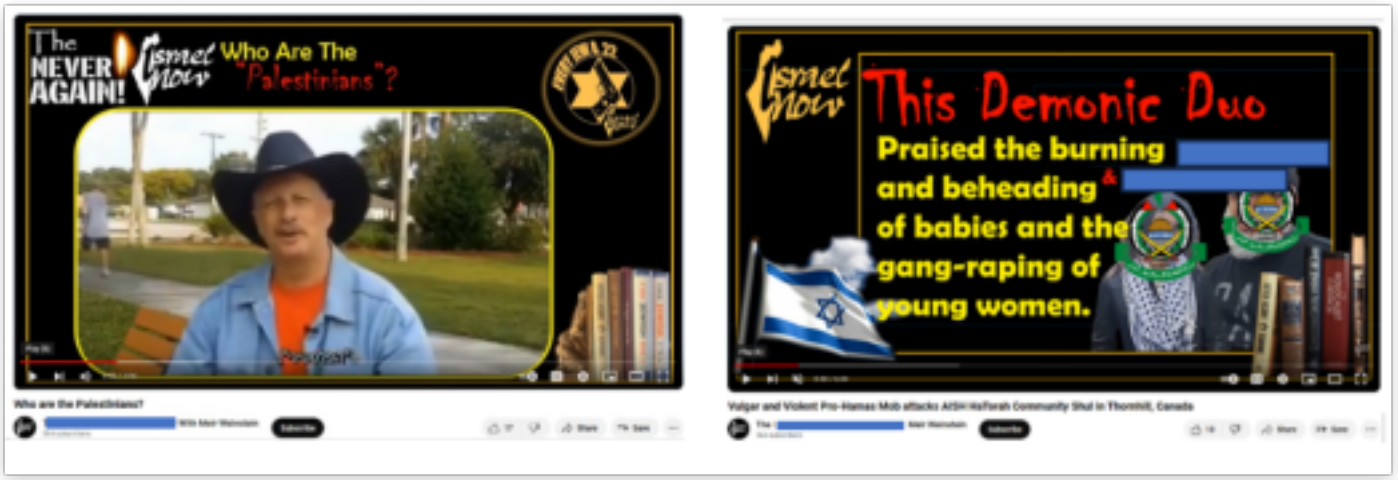
The NEVER AGAIN!
Who Are The "Palestinians"?
This Demonic Duo
Praised the burning & beheading of babies and the gang-raping of young women.

Figure 1: Videos from Never Again Live's YouTube page. Source.

Views on these videos and livestreams are generally low, ranging roughly between 100 and 200. There was a notable uptick following 7 October, after which several live streams received approximately 200-300 views. This bump appears to have tailed off as of April 2024.

The Never Again Live podcast account on X, created in July 2022, had 5,159 followers as of 10 April 2024. The account publicises livestreams and exhorts supporters to attend events and rallies. It also posts about pro-Palestinian events and protesters, including efforts to identify and doxx individual supporters of Palestine.

Israel Now engages in similar behaviour, including filming pro-Palestinian protests and trying to identify members of the crowd. Weinstein has spoken publicly about this and posted about it on social media. One targeted protester has alleged that the co-founder of Israel Now has attempted to intimidate them via email, including threats to publicise photos from an old OnlyFans account. A screenshot shared by the protester appears to show Weinstein also CC'd on these emails. ISD has not independently verified these emails.

Direct and indirect discussions of the use of violence

In livestreams and public appearances, Weinstein has repeatedly spoken about his desire to provide martial arts and firearms training to members of the Jewish community. In a livestreamed meeting (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSm8wy16ohw) with supporters on 25 October 2024, Weinstein talked at length about the need to "teach Jews how to fight", including learning how to shoot. He also discussed the need for a "small group that's going to target [opponents]," saying "That's how you change the dynamic of the fear, when you go after those vicious antisemites. So that's it, that's one of the goals."

In response to a question about how the Jewish community should respond to the potential arrival of refugees from Gaza, Weinstein's answer was blunt: "Learn to fight and learn how to shoot."

The militant tone struck by Weinstein and Never Again Live is matched and at times exceeded by their online audience. Several comments on posts on Weinstein's Facebook profile, which he uses to promote Never Again Live and Israel Now, implicitly or explicitly promote the use of violence against pro-Palestinian protesters.

After Weinstein posted a video to Facebook he captioned as "Western University students celebrating Hamas" one commenter responded saying "$30 pressure cooker. Nuff said", in an apparent reference to a

pressure cooker bomb. A comment on another post, showing the Canadian coordinator of the Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network1 – a pro-Palestinian group recently banned in Germany for celebrating Hamas' October 7 attack – read simply, "Target practice." Weinstein has not responded to either of these comments.

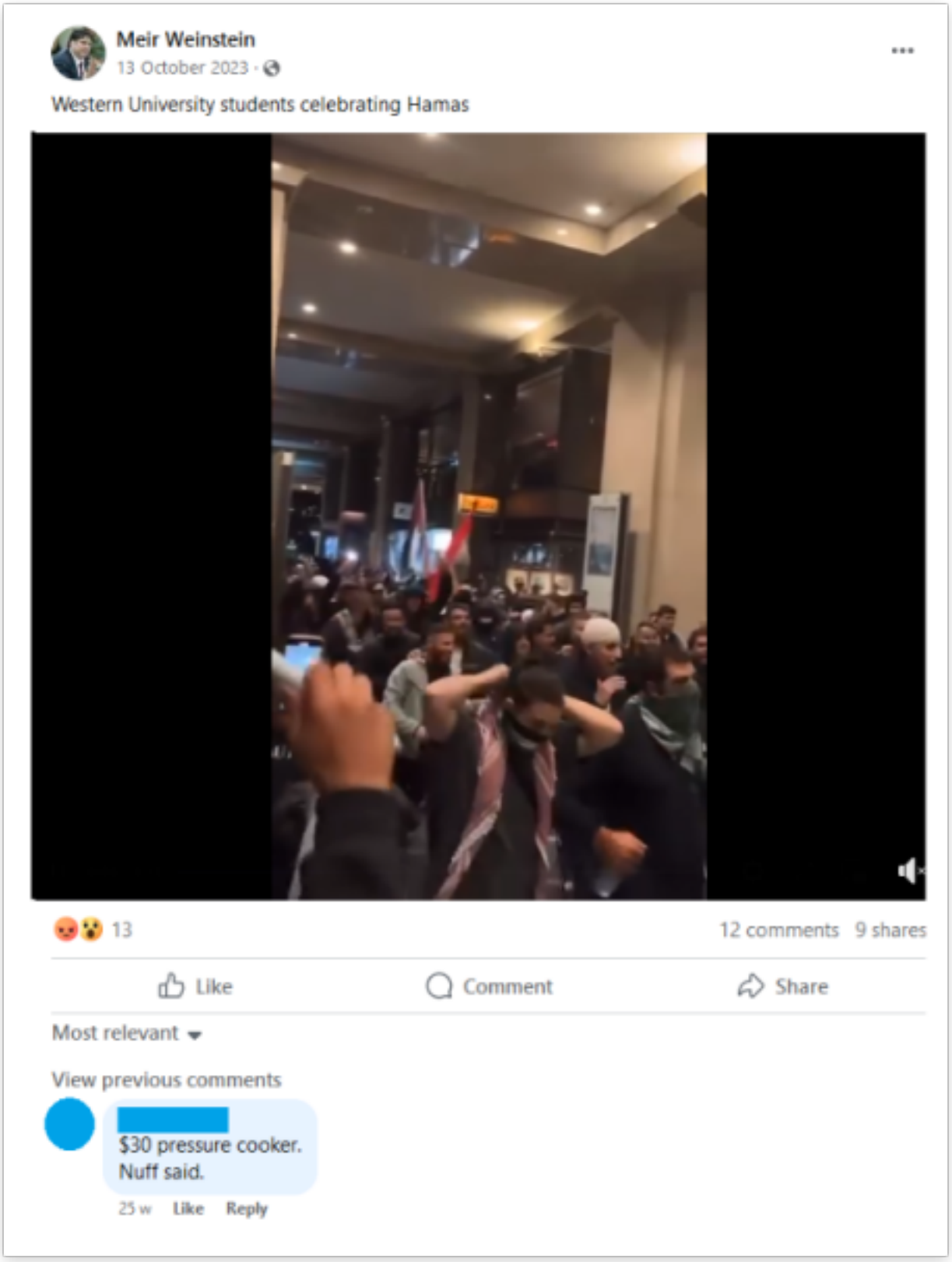

Figure 2: Comments implying the use of violence against Kates on Meir Weinstein's Facebook posts.

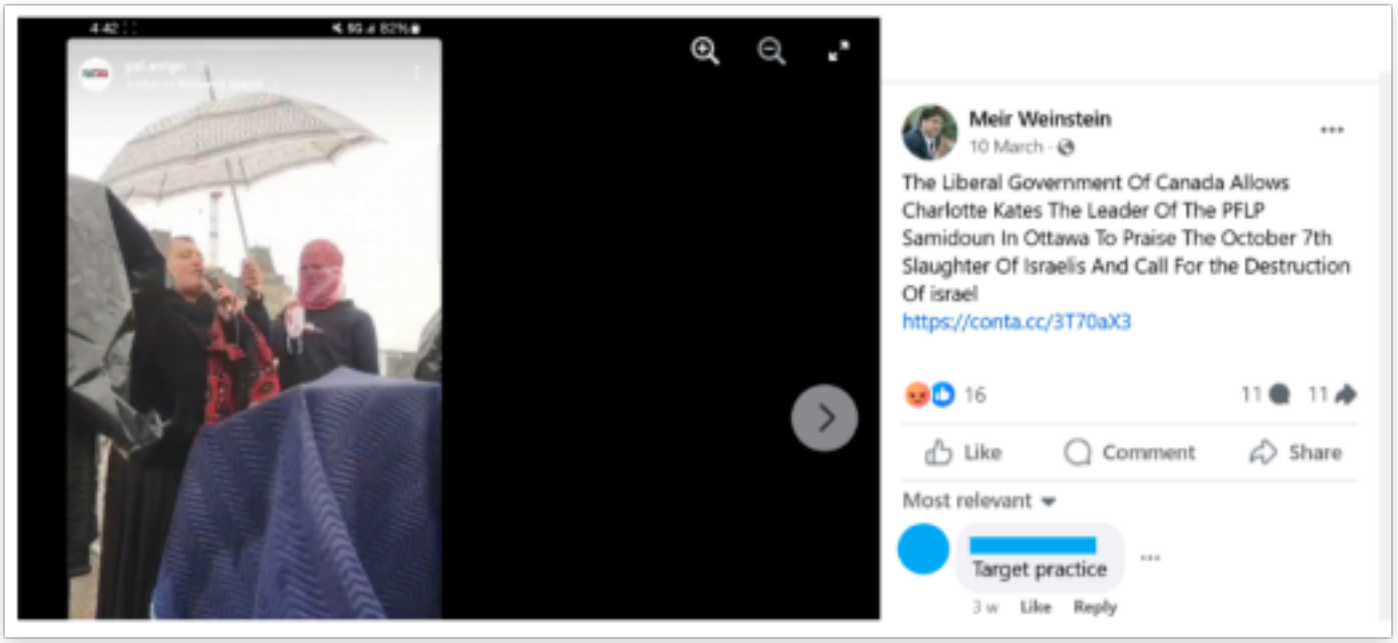

Figure 3: Comments implying the use of violence against Kates on Meir Weinstein's Facebook posts.

While comments like these may never evolve into physical action, they are set against JDL's long history (https://www.adl.org/resources/profile/jewish-defense-league) of violent and at times fatal attacks on political opponents. It is important to take the risk of physical attacks seriously, especially among individuals attracted to Israel Now because of the link to JDL's violent past, and the promise of weapons or combat training.

Islamophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric and ties to the far-right

Rhetoric from Weinstein, and from his supporters and users commenting on his posts, combines Islamophobic sentiments with an opposition to Muslim immigration (see Figure 4). The implication in some of the livestreams and other commentary is that immigration from Islamic countries has created demographic change. They claim that politicians in Western countries are bowing to pressure from that voter base to support Palestine and turn a blind eye to antisemitism.

Weinstein himself spelled this narrative out clearly in a February 2024 livestream (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMzE53dD7t0) with the political activist Baruch Ben Yosef, who was involved (https://theintercept.com/2020/02/06/alex-odeh-bombing-israel/) in the JDL in the US and the Kahanist movement in Israel. Yosef is a longtime associate of Kahane and Weinstein, and a frequent guest on the latter's livestreams. He is now living in Israel but is still wanted for questioning by the FBI in connection with the murder of Arab-American activist Alex Odeh (https://theintercept.com/2020/02/06/alex-odeh-bombing-israel/) in 1985. After Yosef declared that "Judaism is diametrically opposed to democracy", Weinstein intervened (https://youtu.be/RMzE53dD7t0?t=437) to qualify Yosef's statement. He argued that Muslim immigration has led to demographic shifts in Western countries, resulting in a broad increase in antisemitism and a failure to enforce laws to protect Jewish people.

Yosef concurred, describing this as "the basic problem at the core of democracies... we have this crazy situation in which countries that were basically Christian countries, in Europe, they're being taken over by the Muslims."

Comments on Never Again Live's social media channels also reflect an anti-Muslim immigration sentiment.

Many call for pro-Palestinian protesters to be deported, implying that they must be immigrants rather than 'real' Canadians and that they should be "sent back to where they came from".

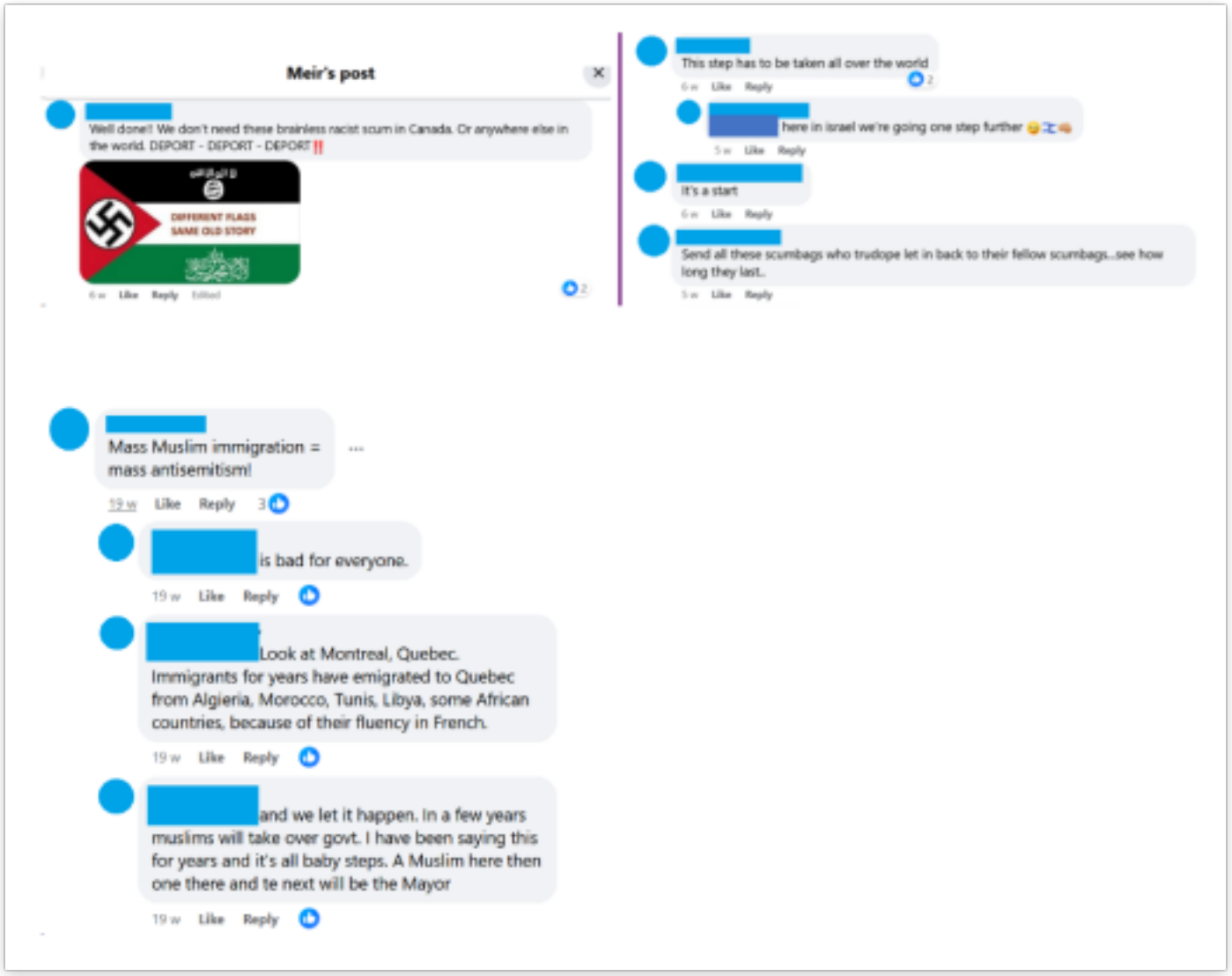
Meir's post
Well done!! We don't need these brainless racist scum in Canada. Or anywhere else in the world. DEPORT - DEPORT - DEPORT !!
DIFFERENT FLAGS
SAME OLD STORY
This step has to be taken all over the world
here in israel we're going one step further
it's a start
Send all these scumbags who trudope let in back to their fellow scumbags...see how long they last..
Mass Muslim immigration = mass antisemitism!
is bad for everyone.
Look at Montreal, Quebec. Immigrants for years have emigrated to Quebec from Algieria, Morocco, Tunis, Libya, some African countries, because of their fluency in French.
and we let it happen. In a few years muslims will take over govt. I have been saying this for years and it's all baby steps. A Muslim here then one there and te next will be the Mayor

Figure 4: Examples of comments in response to a post on Weinstein's personal Facebook account. The replies call for Palestinian supporters to be deported and/or denouncing Muslim immigration and suggesting a Muslim 'takeover'.

Additionally, the Israel Now movement has ties to several other far-right groups active in Canada. The JDL has provided informal security for far-right political rallies including the 'Halifax 5' Proud Boys rally (https://www.warp.media/updated_why_is_a_proud_boy_supporter_advising_an_ontario_minister) in 2017, and have appeared alongside (https://thecjn.ca/news/jdl-partners-soldiers-odin-ad-hoc/) far-right group 'Soldiers of Odin Canada'. In March 2024, an Israel Now event was attended by Hindutva (https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/hindutva-hindu-nationalism/) anti-Muslim activist Ron Banerjee, who has a long history (https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-ron-banerjee-canadian-hindu-advocacy/) of links with the JDL of Canada. In 2018, Bannerjee announced an alliance of organisations (https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rise-canada/) including the JDL of Canada and his own anti-Muslim group Rise Canada (https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rise-canada/).

Conclusion

Israel Now and related outlets such as Never Again Live have been increasingly active since 7 October, targeting a wide range of activists, groups and public figures; implicitly and explicitly encouraging violence against pro-Palestinian protesters; and advocating Jewish militancy. They espouse anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric doxx and allegedly blackmail their enemies. Israel Now's connections to violent far-right

groups, such as the Proud Boys which were heavily involved (https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-in-the-news/how-the-proud-boys-evolved-from-a-boys-drinking-club-into-the-extremist-group-behind-january-6/) in the January 6 insurrection, are a further cause for alarm. It is in this context that the Israel-Hamas conflict and subsequent widespread protests have offered Israel Now and aligned groups and activists an opportunity for publicity and coalition-building.

Related

(https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/one-click-away-foiled-plot-targeting-taylor-swift-concert-highlights-minors-access-to-terrorist-content-online/)

One click away: Foiled plot targeting Taylor Swift concert highlights minors' access to terrorist content online (https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/one-click-away-foiled-plot-targeting-taylor-swift-concert-highlights-minors-access-to-terrorist-content-online/)

With rising online radicalization among minors, social media must improve moderation and stronger regulations like the EU's Digital Services Act are vital. In the case of the US, there is a lag in safeguards.

(https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/total-system-collapse-far-right-telegram-network-incites-accelerationist-violence-after-southport-stabbings/)

‘Total system collapse’: Far-right Telegram network incites hate & violence after Southport stabbings (https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/total-system-collapse-far-right-telegram-network-incites-accelerationist-violence-after-southport-stabbings/)

The Southport stabbings have led to anti-Muslim hate and violence in UK cities. This Dispatch analyses how 16 Telegram channels incited violence and spread hate.

(https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-foundations-of-violence-the-growth-of-far-right-hate-in-the-uk/)

The foundations of violence: The growth of far-right hate in the UK (https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-foundations-of-violence-the-growth-of-far-

right-hate-in-the-uk/)

This Dispatch examines three key dynamics underpinning the far-right riots taking place across the UK: the transformation of far-right extremism, increased targeting of migrants, and rising anti-Muslim hate.

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